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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the evaluation of the 4-H youth program (serving ages 9 through 19) in Yolo County, California. The paper concentrates on the first component of the evaluation plan, a telephone survey of community needs and perceptions regarding services for youth which was conducted in November, 1984. The originally perceived questions concerned the involvement of 4-H members and volunteer leaders. Regarding youth involvement, the major concern was a recent pattern of enrollment decline. Extensive questions regarding youth involvement were categorized under the general areas of community assessment and program marketing. The purposes of the community survey were to gauge community feeling about educational topics most needed for young people; to determine public awareness and understanding of 4-H; and to investigate the most useful sources for families seeking information on the 4-H program. From a randomly drawn sample of 500 households, 246 interviews were completed. The empirically-based conclusions will aid 4-H staff to inform families about currently available 4-H services. The process provided a useful example of the role that formative evaluation can play in the consideration of programmatic issues. The phone survey instrument and results are appended. (PN)

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DETERMINING DIRECTIONS FOR CHANGE IN A COUNTY 4-H YOUTH PROGRAM: THE ROLE OF EVALUATION

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University of California Cooperative Extension

Presented at the joint meeting of the Canadian Evaluation Society, Evaluation Network, and Evaluation Research Society

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Mighty oaks grow from little acorns, according to the old adage. It is also sometimes true that comprehensive, formative program evaluations grow from what are originally fairly specific questions about program delivery. This paper describes the evaluation of a county-wide 4-H youth program, which developed out of attempts to address relatively narrow concerns. In the process, the uses of internally initiated, formative evaluation are well illustrated. The paper concentrates on the first component of the evaluation plan, a survey of community needs and perceptions regarding services for youth.

Description of the 4-H Program

The California 4-H program is available to all young persons in the state between the ages of 9 and 19. The primary, though not the only, mode of participation for youth is through 4-H clubs, which meet regularly in local settings. The adults who interact with youth on a regular basis and maintain the clubs are the 4-H leaders, who are volunteers from the local community - often parents of past or present 4-H members.

In California, 4-H is one of several programs administered by University of California Cooperative Extension, which is a unit of the University's Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources. County 4-H personnel are located in each county's Cooperative Extension office, which usually is situated in the county seat. Development and management of the county's program

is maintained by 4-H Youth Advisors, who are under the supervision of their County Director. The 4-H program also has disciplinary area Specialists working in areas such as educational research & evaluation, curriculum development, program outreach, and staff development & training. Specialists are housed in academic departments on University of California campuses.

Areas of programmatic concern

Yolo County lies in a predominantly rural area in north-central California, directly west of Sacramento. In early 1984, the County Director, the county's two 4-H Youth Advisors, and the State 4-H Evaluation Specialist (constituting the internal "evaluation team") met to discuss several specific questions regarding Yolo's 4-H program. In the course of their discussions, the focus of the questions broadened to include more general perspectives on the program. This development was characteristic of many formative evaluation settings, in which the real questions of interest emerge only after careful consideration and thought. Speculations about surface problems and their probable causes lead to new perceptions on what information is most needed.

The originally perceived questions concerned the involvement of 4-H members and volunteer leaders. Regarding youth involvement, the major concern was a recent pattern of enrollment decline. Thus the original questions were: "How can we get more youth to enroll in 4-H?" and "Once enrolled, how can we serve

their needs sufficiently to keep them in the program?" Regarding volunteer leaders, the questions originally concerned participation in the representative, decision-making body for 4-H volunteers, known as the 4-H Leaders' Council. Such questions included: "Do most leaders know about the decisions made by the Council?" and "Why don't more leaders attend Council meetings?"

Further discussion uncovered several possible areas of investigation that could contribute to an understanding of the enrollment patterns. One such area was the self-perceived needs of the community pertaining to its youth, and the degree to which 4-H was meeting those needs. Another was the identification of the image that 4-H has among youth and parents. The program has traditionally been tied closely to a farm-oriented curriculum, but in the past decade its scope and available activities have undergone a considerable broadening. Public awareness of these changes may not have kept pace, possibly leading to a general image of 4-H in the community that is limited and outdated in relation to the program's full range of available services. A third topic to investigate was the availability of information sources for families that sought information. In short, the more extensive questions about youth involvement could be categorized under the general areas of community needs assessment and program marketing. Other central evaluation questions that were identified by the evaluation team included the following:

- How can 4-H be more responsive to the needs of Yolo County's large Hispanic population? How can this community best be reached?

- How do junior high school and high school students perceive of 4-H? What organized groups do they belong to? What do they perceive as general youth needs?
- What are the training needs of new and experienced 4-H volunteer leaders, respectively? How satisfied are they with their roles in the program? What are their assessments of the Leaders' Council functions?
- How successful are the planned educational activities in fulfilling instructional objectives? How effective, from an instructional point of view, are the leader-member interactions?

The Evaluation Plan

When there exists a range of questions as extensive as the one listed above, it is necessary to prioritize the informational needs. A multi-faceted plan was developed to address the identified questions. The elements of this plan included the following components:

- a phone survey of the general community.
- a survey of 4-H club members.
- a survey of 4-H club volunteer leaders.
- key informant interviews with opinion leaders.
- objectives-based tests on project content to 4-H members.

The remainder of this paper will concentrate on the first of the above components to be completed, the county community-wide telephone survey. Other components described above are scheduled

for later implementation.

The community survey: Method

There were several general purposes for the community survey. The first was to gauge community feelings about the educational topics that are most needed for young people. A second was to address some fairly specific marketing concerns, such as determining general public awareness and understanding of 4-H, and determining the most useful information outlets. More specifically, the key questions that were identified included the following:

- What proportion of people have heard of 4-H in Yolo County?
- What proportion of people know that 4-H is a part of the University of California?
- Do other youth-serving groups reduce available time for young people to belong to 4-H?
- How important does the community perceive the available 4-H projects to be?
- What is the community's perception of what 4-H offers for young people, in terms of educational projects?
- What topics might 4-H be offering that it is not at present?
- What are the most important outlets of information for 4-H?

The evaluation team developed the survey to be adminstered to the community. In addition, however, it was important to

consider the role of 4-H volunteer leaders, who constituted a major stakeholder group. Leader assistance was going to be necessary to administer the survey, and they would be called upon to help implement any resulting program changes through their ongoing leadership of the 4-H clubs. Therefore, leader opinions were solicited through group meetings at several stages of the development process. Several important refinements and edits resulted from these meetings.

A copy of the questionnaire telephone protocol is attached as Figure 1.

The unit of analysis for the survey was the individual household. As can be seen, the protocol introduction asks whether there is "an adult at home who could spare a few minutes to answer some questions about 4-H." Thus, parents were allowed to choose who would respond to the survey. This was deemed desirable in those cases where one household member might answer the telephone call but be too busy to participate in the interview, or where one parent was less knowledgeable about the children's activities than the other parent.

Considerable care was taken in the selection of the telephone sample, which was identified through the procedure of systematic sampling (Sudman, 1976). As a first step, it was decided to utilize telephone directories as the sampling frame, from which a sample of respondents would be drawn as representative of all residents in the county. The use of directories has several known shortcomings, particularly the omission from the sample of residents without telephones or

telephone listings. Overall, however, this sampling frame is considered quite acceptable (e.g., Sudman, 1976), particularly since there are few real alternatives available to the survey researcher who must cover, with limited resources, a specific geographically-defined population. A more immediate problem was equating selection probabilities for all county residents, since the county had a number of directories, some of which crossed over into neighboring counties. However, this problem was essentially logistical, and it was addressed through calculating the necessary sampling intervals in each case based on geographical stratification considerations and the overall size of each list.

Sample size decisions were made partly on the basis of practicality. For dichotomous questionnaire items (e.g., "Have you ever heard of the 4-H program?"), a 95% confidence interval of plus or minus .05 (5 percentage points) around the true population value required a sample of 346. On the other hand, a confidence interval of .06 required a sample of only 266. On the basis of considerations regarding available interviewers, the evaluation team decided to aim for a sample of 250. This would yield a confidence interval of .062. This level of statistical accuracy was judged to be acceptable.

A sample of 500 resident county households was drawn and randomly ordered. The size of this initial list was chosen in anticipation that the interview completion rate would be, at the lowest, 50% of the targeted households. The calling was conducted by proceeding down the list of respondent households

until the necessary number of interviews was completed. Since the list was randomly ordered after it was compiled, this subsample would constitute a random sample.

The telephone interviews were conducted on three sessions in November, 1984. The times chosen were Tuesday evening, Wednesday evening, and Saturday midday, all during a single week. This sampling of time periods represents a range of those times that produce the highest proportions of telephone interview completions, according to previous studies (Weeks, Jones, Folson, & Benrud, 1980).

The interviewing team was composed of 4-H staff, volunteer leaders, and club members of high school age. The calls were made from the Yolo County 4-H office. Interviewers strictly followed the written protocol. Records were kept for each calling attempt and its result (completion, no answer, busy signal, refusal, etc.). In the case of busy signals and no answers, three attempts to reach the number were made, including callbacks at the next calling session.

By the end of the three calling sessions, 246 completed interviews had been obtained.

Results

The results were examined for all households in the sample, and also for only those households that had children of 4-H-eligible age (hereafter referred to as the "4-H-eligible families"). Table 1 presents the descriptive results for each of these two groupings. The results show that a very large

proportion of the community (91%) has heard of 4-H, but far fewer (30%) know of its affiliation with the University of California. These figures are not appreciably different for the 4-H-eligible families. Children who were not in 4-H participated to a moderate degree in other youth activities: in 26 of the 57 4-H-eligible families, at least one of the children was in another group, most frequently Scouts or organized team sports.

The average ratings of importance for the subject areas taught in 4-H all lay between the points of "Important" and "Very Important", but ranged from 2.70 for "Consumer skills" down to 2.25 for "Creative arts, such as photography". The differences between these ratings were examined using paired t tests. For the full sample, differences between subject areas of .09 point or more tended to be statistically significant at the .05 level, and differences of .14 point or more tended to be statistically significant at the .01 level. (Some exceptions in this pattern existed due to differences in the variables' standard errors.) However, this group of tests must be interpreted with caution, because the extensive degrees of freedom associated with a sample size of 246 tends to make even small differences statistically significant.

More meaningful significance tests were associated with the restricted, 4-H-eligible sample, which contained only 57 subjects, affording a more appropriate level of statistical power. In this smaller sample, differences of .17 or more tended to be statistically significant at .05, and differences of .26 or more tended to be significant at .01, again with some variation

based on the size of the variables' standard errors. The activities judged most important were "Leadership skills", "Coed activities for teens", "Consumer skills", and "Computers". The activities judged least important were "Sports clubs" and "Creative arts".

The results regarding awareness of 4-H subject areas showed large differences among the listed topics. For the entire sample, the percentage of respondents who reported being aware of particular 4-H subjects ranged from 84% for animal-raising to 15% for computers. For the 4-H-eligible families, the ordinal rankings were similar, but there was relatively more awareness of the subjects at the lower end of the list (27% for the lowest-ranked subject, computers).

When asked where they would go for more information about 4-H, there was little consensus in the sample. The most-often mentioned source was the county Cooperative Extension office (i.e., the 4-H office), cited by 15% of the sample, followed by the local school (14%), the telephone directory (11%), and 4-H members and leaders (10%). Among the 4-H-eligible families the most frequent responses were the local school (19%), 4-H members and leaders (16%), the telephone directory (14%), and the Cooperative Extension office (12%).

Although the unit of analysis was the household, the interviewers recorded the sex of the individual interview participants for that variable's possible interpretive value. For the entire sample, 42% were male, 58% female. For the 4-H-eligible families, the percentages were identical.

Conclusions

One of the most clear-cut findings from the survey involved the community's conception of what 4-H does. The overall awareness of the individual subject matter areas can be viewed as operationally defining one aspect of the general "4-H image", namely, what youth can learn from participating in the program. As had been initially suspected, the public's perceptions do indeed correspond to the more traditional part of the 4-H program. The three topics most closely associated with an agricultural/home economics curriculum -- animal-raising, plants, and consumer skills -- all placed within the top five subjects on "respondent awareness", both for the full sample and the 4-H-eligible subsample. Indeed, these subject areas still occupy an important place within 4-H; however, it would also benefit the program to increase public awareness of the other activities it offers.

The results on where respondents would go for more information also carry some strong implications for the 4-H staff. First, none of the possible sources was mentioned by more than 19% of the sample, indicating that no one potential information source will reach or be utilized by the lion's share of the community. Second, of those sources that were frequently mentioned, two of the top four -- the Cooperative Extension office, and 4-H members and leaders -- could be classified as "in-house", in that they required some prior familiarity with the program, either with its administrative home or with its

participants. Thus, it may be concluded that eligible families will remain largely unaware of the program if left to their own information resources. If potential members are to be reached, it must be through active efforts aimed at increasing general program visibility.

The ranking of subject matter areas with regard to their importance for youth programs are of interest for curriculum planning purposes. Three of the areas ranked in the top four -- "Consumer skills", "Leadership skills", and "Computers" -- might all be viewed as involving general lifestyle survival skills that are increasingly important in society today. Some of the more specific, and perhaps career-oriented, topics -- animal-raising, engineering, plants & soil science -- were judged only moderately important. Activities that might be viewed (perhaps narrowly) as leisure-related or just for fun -- outdoor camping, sports clubs, and creative arts -- were ranked low. "Coed activities for teens", which received a relatively high ranking, was the sole exception to this interpretation. If there is a pattern to these rankings, it seems to be that respondents felt youth need to be spending their out-of-school time seriously developing self-reliance skills for the future.

Summary

The full evaluation by 4-H staff of the Yolo County program will be conducted over an extended period of time, allowing for the schedules of the evaluation team. However, the first component of this process, the community telephone survey, was

completed and led to several clear, empirically-based conclusions. These will be particularly important for 4-H staff in their design of activities aimed at informing families about currently available 4-H services. The process provided a useful example of the role that formative evaluation can play in the consideration of programmatic issues.

References

Sudman, S. (1976) Applied sampling. New York: Academic Press.

Weeks, M.F., Jones, B.L., Folson, R.E., & Benrud, C.H. (1980) Optimal times to contact sample households. Public Opinion Quarterly, 44, 101-114.

Figure 1

YOLO COUNTY PHONE SURVEY

Introduction:

Hello, my name is _____ and I am a 4-H volunteer from Yolo County. The 4-H program is doing a survey of people living in Yolo County to see how we can improve the program. We would like to talk with an adult at home who could spare a few minutes to answer some questions about 4-H?

IF ANOTHER PERSON IS PUT ON THE PHONE: Hello, my name is _____ and I am a 4-H volunteer from Yolo County. The 4-H program is doing a survey of people living in Yolo County to see how we can improve the program. Could you spare a few minutes to answer some questions for me about 4-H?

Questions:

1. Have you ever heard of 4-H?

___ NO

4. Do you have any children under the age of 20?

___ NO (GO ON TO NEXT PAGE)

___ YES .... What are their ages?

_____ _____

_____ _____

___ YES

2. Did you know that in California, 4-H is part of the University of California?

___ NO ___ YES

3. Have you ever been involved with the 4-H program as a member or leader?

___ NO ___ YES.... Member? ___

Leader? ___

4. Do you have any children under the age of 20?

___ NO (GO ON TO NEXT PAGE)

___ YES .... What are their ages?

_____ _____

_____ _____

5. Has your child / Have your children } been in 4-H?

___ NO

___ YES.... Which ones? (List by ages) _____ _____

_____ _____

.... Is he/she / Are they } in 4-H now?

___ NO ___ YES (List by ages) _____ _____

_____ _____

6. Could you please tell me why your child/children left 4-H? (CHECK THE ANSWER THAT COMES CLOSEST - DO NOT READ THESE ANSWERS OUT LOUD)

a. Activities were not interesting to the child. ___

b. Project groups did not meet often enough. ___

c. Group leaders were not satisfactory. ___

d. Child followed other interests. ___

e. Child reached age limit. ___

f. Other (Describe briefly) _____ ___

_____

_____

7. Is he/she / Are they } in an organized youth group other than 4-H, such as Scouts or Future Farmers of America?

___ NO

___ YES.... Which groups? (List by ages if appropriate)

_____

_____

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8. I am going to read a list of topics. For each one, how important is it for a community youth organization to teach that topic?
Rate each one as being NOT IMPORTANT, IMPORTANT, or VERY IMPORTANT.

	NOT IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT
a. Animal-raising such as dogs, goats, rabbits, or birds	_____	_____	_____
b. Engineering topics such as bicycles, automobiles, or small engines	_____	_____	_____
c. Consumer skills such as clothing, textiles, or foods and nutrition	_____	_____	_____
d. Plants and soil sciences	_____	_____	_____
e. Outdoor camping trips	_____	_____	_____
f. Sports clubs such as track or soccer	_____	_____	_____
g. Creative arts such as photography	_____	_____	_____
h. Computers	_____	_____	_____
i. Leadership skills through public speaking, holding office, or working on committees	_____	_____	_____
j. Providing coeducational activities for teenagers	_____	_____	_____

9. Are there other activities you can think of that are very important for a youth organization to offer?

_____

_____

10. I am going to quickly read the topics again. For each one, could you tell me whether you were aware that 4-H teaches that topic?

	AWARE	NOT AWARE	NOT SURE
a. Animal-raising such as dogs, goats, rabbits, or birds	____	_____	_____
b. Engineering topics such as bicycles, automobiles, or small engines	____	_____	_____
c. Consumer skills such as clothing, textiles, or foods and nutrition	____	_____	_____
d. Plants and soil sciences	____	_____	_____
e. Outdoor camping trips	____	_____	_____
f. Sports clubs such as track or soccer	____	_____	_____
g. Creative arts such as photography	____	_____	_____
h. Computers	____	_____	_____
i. Leadership skills through public speaking, holding office, or working on committees	____	_____	_____
j. Providing coeducational activities for teenagers	____	_____	_____

11. If you were interested in more information about 4-H, where would you seek more information?

_____

IF THE PERSON HAS NEVER BEEN A 4-H LEADER:

12. Have you ever been asked to be a 4-H leader?

_____ NO _____ YES

13. Thank you very much for your help! Do you have any questions you would like to ask?

_____

_____

14. Would you like a 4-H staff member to contact you with more information about 4-H?

_____ NO _____ YES.... Address information _____

_____

_____

(CALLER CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING: _____ MALE _____ FEMALE)

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Table 1
Telephone Survey Results

Question		Full sample (N=246)	4-H-eligible sample (N=57)
1. Have you ever heard of 4-H?	Yes:	91 %	86 %
	No:	9 %	16 %
2. Did you know that in California, 4-H is part of the University of California?	Yes:	30 %	35 %
	No:	70 %	65 %
3. Percentages of respondents who were aware that 4-H teaches indicated topic:	Animal-raising:	84 %	86 %
	Leadership skills:	73 %	71 %
	Plants & soil sci.:	71 %	77 %
	Coed activities for teens:	62 %	61 %
	Consumer skills:	61 %	68 %
	Outdoor camping trips:	48 %	51 %
	Creative arts:	38 %	45 %
	Engineering topics:	36 %	46 %
	Sports clubs:	19 %	30 %
	Computers:	15 %	27 %
4. If you wanted more information about 4-H, where would you go?	Cooperative Extension office:	15 %	12 %
	School:	14 %	19 %
	Phone book:	11 %	14 %
	4-H members & leaders:	10 %	16 %
5. Respondents' opinions about the most important subjects to be taught. ..... (Figures are average scores for the sample. Scale: 1=Not Important; 2=Important; 3=Very Important)	Consumer skills:	2.70	2.67
	Leadership skills:	2.66	2.77
	Coed activities for teens:	2.63	2.70
	Computers:	2.56	2.62
	Animal-raising:	2.51	2.48
	Engineering topics:	2.51	2.56
	Outdoor camping trips:	2.41	2.44
	Plants & soil sci.:	2.41	2.55
	Sports clubs:	2.32	2.26
	Creative arts:	2.25	2.27